

Amendments to the Claims: This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant, comprising:
 - a) a flash evaporator for producing an overhead product and a bottoms product;
 - b) vapor concentration means downstream of said flash evaporator to receive said overhead product;
 - c) a multi-stage condenser downstream of said vapor concentration means;
 - d) rectification means between said condenser stages; and
 - e) means for recycling at least part of a condensate from a condensation stage to said bottoms product, wherein the condenser is positioned in such way that the bottoms product serves as a heat carrier liquid for the condenser before being recycled to the evaporator.
2. (Canceled)
3. (Canceled)
4. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein two to four condensation stages are provided with a rectification interposed between each of said condensation stages.
5. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.
6. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5 comprising 2two condensation stages.
7. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.
8. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

9. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, additionally comprising means for actively directing the bottoms product through the condenser.

10. (Original) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 9 wherein the means for actively directing the bottoms product is a circulating pump.

11. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 comprising a pre-vacuum pump in addition to the concentration means.

12. (Original) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 11, wherein the pre-vacuum pump is an oil-driven liquid-ring pump.

13. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, comprising a means on the distillate side for depositing solid and/or liquid components entrained by the overhead product during flash evaporation.

14. (Currently Amended) A process for concentration of aqueous alcoholic solutions ~~having a fixed water to alcohol ratio~~ wherein:

- a) the solution is expanded under vacuum to form an overhead product and a bottoms product;
- b) pressurizing and transporting said overhead product to a multi-stage condenser;
- c) separating said overhead product into its less volatile and more volatile components; and
- d) using at least part of the condensate from at least one stage of said condenser to form a bottoms product having a desired concentration for recycle to step a) wherein the bottoms product is used as a heat carrier liquid for the condensation stages.

15. (Canceled)

16. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein two condensation steps are carried out in step c) starting from binary solutions and wherein at least part of the condensate of the second stage is recycled to the bottoms product.

17. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein the condensate is recycled in an amount so that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

18. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

19. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14 including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 21, wherein the condenser is positioned in such way that the bottoms product serves as a heat carrier liquid for the condenser before being recycled to the evaporator.

23. (Canceled)

24. (Canceled)

25. (Canceled)

26. (Canceled)

27. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)

30. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

31. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

32. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 6, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

33. (Canceled)

34. (Canceled)

35. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

36. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

37. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 6, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

38. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation according to claim 7, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

39. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim ~~15~~14, wherein two condensation steps are carried out in step c) starting from binary solutions and wherein at least part of the condensate of the second stage is recycled to the bottoms product.

40. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim ~~15~~14, wherein the condensate is recycled in such an amount that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

41. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, wherein the condensate is recycled in such an amount that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

42. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim ~~15~~14, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

43. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

44. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 17, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

45. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim ~~15~~14, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

46. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

47. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 17, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

48. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 18, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

49. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, including the step of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of from 30 to 70 vol.-%.

50. (Currently Amended) A process for concentrating a plant extract in form of an aqueous alcoholic solution ~~without negatively affecting the properties of the concentrated extract from said process~~ wherein:

- a) the solution is expanded under vacuum to form an overhead product and a bottoms product;
- b) pressurizing and transporting said overhead product to a multi-stage condenser;
- c) separating said overhead product into its less volatile and more volatile components; and
- d) using at least part of the condensate from at least one stage of said condenser to form a bottoms product having a desired concentration for recycle to step a).

51. (Canceled)